



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

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Testimony of Patricia A. Rehmer, MSN, Commissioner
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Before the Veterans Committee
March 3, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessey and distinguished members of the Veterans Committee. I am Patricia Rehmer, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I am here today to speak to **SB 1015 AN ACT EXPANDING PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS IN THE JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT**. DMHAS is supportive of all efforts made in reaching out to our veteran community in the criminal justice system and would like to take this opportunity to inform you of programs currently being provided.

The Connecticut Jail Diversion and Trauma Recovery Program for Veterans:

In October 2008 DMHAS was awarded a \$2 million, five year grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, to establish a jail diversion program for veterans who are struggling with trauma-related symptoms. This grant builds upon the successes of the existing DMHAS statewide jail diversion infrastructure. The grant required the first-year piloting of jail diversion efforts in a single region of the state, with statewide replication to follow. In that the southeast region is home to the Groton Naval Sub-Base, Camp Rell, the Stone Ranch Training Facility, a VA Veterans Readjustment and Counseling Center, and has the busiest VA community-based outpatient clinic in the state, the Norwich-New London area was selected as the site for this pilot initiative. The DMHAS Southeastern Mental Health Authority located in Norwich administered the regional pilot. The project was continued by DMHAS after the 6 year grant expired in September of last year.

The grant also required completion of a comprehensive planning process during the first year that resulted in the direct submission of a strategic plan to SAMHSA. A plan was approved by SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services and we have expanded the program to additional sites in Middletown and Danielson. Since its inception over 700 veterans have been served by this program.

To meet the grant's strategic planning requirements, DMHAS has convened local and state advisory boards comprised of veterans with trauma-related histories who are involved in the criminal justice system, as well as representatives from the federal and state Departments of Veterans' Affairs, the Judicial Department, the Chief State's Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, the V.A. Veterans' Center System, the Departments of Labor, Social Services and Correction, and several other affected

organizations. The goal of the planning process was to establish a formal structure that would, at the earliest opportunity, divert or refer veterans with trauma-related symptoms from the criminal justice system to a seamless system of treatment and recovery support services.

Similar to the MSP Program, Connecticut's Jail Diversion Program for Veterans brings together staff of three distinct systems — the VA, DMHAS, and the Judicial Branch — to jointly operate a program by which veterans who experience involvement with the criminal justice system can be diverted to treatment and necessary services, rather than incarcerated. Operated exclusively for veterans, the program is designed to ease their transition back to the community following their experience in war. We believe these programs are important pieces to veterans' reintegration back from theater.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee today on this important program. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.